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ABSTRACT

Noting that professional development activities are a key component in the continuous process of improving instruction, this guide assists schools that are considering a visit to a Leadership and Learning Best Practice site (Illinois schools that have demonstrated a commitment to the reading best practices as identified by the Best Practices and Resources Committee of the Right to Read Initiative). After discussing its purpose, the guide lists questions to ask when selecting a site to visit. It then lists the 22 Best Practice sites and provides a chart indicating what sites are implementing which of the 14 reading best practices. The guide then offers advice in focusing the observation of the site. It also lists possible strategies for each best practice to look for in the classroom, and questions to consider after completing a site visit. Contains a 7-item list of resources available through the Illinois State Board of Education. (RS)

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Getting the Most From a Site Visit

A Guide to Assist Schools Visiting a Leadership and Learning Site for Reading Best Practices

Illinois State Board of Education

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PURPOSE

This guide will assist schools that are considering a visit to a Leadership and Learning Reading Best Practice Site.

Professional development activities are a key component in the continuous process of improving instruction. Educators consistently express the desire to exchange ideas about instructional methods and strategies used to improve student learning. Teachers often feel isolated and express an interest in observing other classrooms to learn new strategies and validate their current practices.

The research of the past decade illuminates the way children learn to read and write and how educators can enhance the process. The Best Practices and Resources Committee of the Right to Read Initiative has conducted an extensive review of the research and identified 14 best practices to guide Illinois schools in creating a balanced reading program in our schools for every child. The goal is to offer an opportunity for teachers and administrators to visit schools that have demonstrated a commitment to the reading best practices. Some schools may choose to send staff members to a site that may be implementing a program that is similar to their own; while others may want to visit a school to learn more about a specific best practice and how a strategy was implemented.

Selecting a Site to Visit

- What major issue is your school/district/community focusing on regarding literacy? _____
- What would your team like to learn from participating in a visit? The following prompts are listed to assist teams in their decisions:
  - The reading best practices we want to know more about are _____.
  - A strategy that we would most like to learn how to implement is _____.
  - We would like to ask grade level teachers about their experiences and problems in implementing _____.
  - We will observe how students interact when the teacher is implementing _____.
  - We would like to see student work that reflects _____.
  - A student assessment we would like to know more about is _____.
  - We will schedule a time to reflect on the visit to discuss _____.
- Which staff members at our school currently implement strategies that support the Reading Best Practices selected? How can this be linked to the site visit?
- Which site best matches your schools' priorities?
- How many staff members should participate? (grade levels, disciplines, knowledge base, influence on/relationship with other content areas)?
- Will an administrator be a part of the team?
- How can the team become more knowledgeable about the Best Practices that will be observed before the actual visit?
- How will the information be shared and used?

READING BEST PRACTICE SITES

Adlai Stevenson HSD #125
One Stevenson Drive
Lincolnshire, IL 60069
Contact/Phone: Wendell Schwartz - 847/634-4000

Anna CCSD #37
301 S. Green Street
Anna, IL 62906
Contact/Phone: Karen Hubbs - 618/833-6812

DesPlaines Elementary SD #62/Plainfield Sch.I
777 Algonquin Road
DesPlaines, IL 60018
Contact/Phone: Maxine Hubbard - 847/824-1301

Downers Grove High School Dist. #99
6301 Springside Avenue
Downers Grove, IL 60516
Contact/Phone:: Wm. F. Renner - 630/271-6699

Edwardsville CUSD #7
708 St. Louis Street
Edwardsville, IL 62025
Contact/Phone: Lynda Andre - 618/656-1182

Evanston School Dist. #65
Martin Luther King Lab School
1314 Ridge Avenue
Evanston, IL 60201
Contact/Phone: Lynn McCarthy - 847/492-5870

Harlem Unit Dist. 122
P.o. Box 2021
Loves Park, IL 61130
Contact/Phone: Lynn Gibson - 815/654-4500

LaHarpe CUSD #335
404 W. Main Street
LaHarpe, IL 61450
Contact/Phone: Steven Breckon - 217/659-7730

Lockport Twp. HSD #205
1323 East 7th St.
Lockport, IL 60441
Contact/Phone: Richard Dittle - 815/588-8100

Monmouth District #38
325 South 11th Street
Monmouth, IL 61462
Contact/Phone: Donna McCaw - 309/734-2213

Mundelein HSD #120
1350 W. Hawley Street
Mundelein, IL 60060
Contact/Phone: Sally Pilcher- -847/949-2200

Naperville District #203/River Woods School
203 W. Hillside
Naperville, IL 60540
Contact/Phone:: Joan Forman - 630/420-6630

Palatine CCSD #15/Central Road School
580 North 1st Bank Drive
Palatine, IL 60067
Contact/Phone: Jill Weininger - 847/934-2908

Palatine CCSD #15/Jane Addams School
580 North 1st Bank Drive
Palatine, IL 60067
Contact/Phone: Charles Accardi - 847/934-2856

Palatine CCSD #15/Lake Louise School
580 North 1st Bank Drive
Palatine, IL 60067
Contact/Phone: Cheryl A. Kmiecik -
847/934-2860

Plainfield Consolidated High School Dist. #202
500 West Fort Beggs Drive
Plainfield, IL 60544
Contact/Phone: Eve Panice - 815/439-3240

Riverside PSD 1896
63 Woodside Road
Riverside, IL 60546
Contact/Phone: Linda Farley - 708/447-3252

Springfield District #186/Hay Edwards
1900 W. Monroe Street
Springfield, IL 62704
Contact/Phone: Shari Hibbert - 21/525-3220

Springfield District #186/Fairview School
1900 W. Monroe St.
Springfield, IL 62074
Contact/Phone: Linda Johnson - 217/525-3211

CUSD #7/Sydney Grade School
P.O. Box 5
Tolono, IL 61880
Contact/Phone: Mary Weaver - 217/485-6510

V.L.T. CUSD #2
1502 East US 136
Table Grove, IL 61482
Contact/Phone: Newton Fink - 309/758-5138

Wheeling District #21/Longfellow School
999 W. Dundee Road
Wheeling, IL 60090
Contact/Phone: Debra S. Rose - 847/537-8270

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Learning and Leadership Schools for Reading Best Practices

School/City	Type of District/School	Geographic Area	Best Practices													
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Adlai Stevenson, Lincolnshire	High School	North			X	X										
2. Anna	Elementary	South			X					X						
3. DesPlaines - Plainfield	Elementary	Chicago Suburb				X					X					
4. Downers Grove	High School	Chicago Suburb		X								X				
5. Edwardsville	Middle School	South							X		X					
6. Evanston - ML King	Elementary	North	X											X		
7. Harlem District 122	Elementary	Rockford Area	X	X												
8. LaHarpe	Elementary	West Central							X	X						
9. Lockport	High School	Joliet Area			X	X										
10. Monmouth	Elementary	West Central		X				X								
11. Mundelein	High School	North				X	X									
12. Naperville – River Woods	Elementary	Chicago Suburb		X				X								
13. Palatine – Ctr. Rd. Sch.	Elementary	Chicago Suburb			X							X				
14. Palatine – Jane Addams	Elementary	Chicago Suburb										X		X		
15. Palatine – Lake Louise	Elementary	Chicago Suburb	X									X				
16. Plainfield	High School	Joliet Area						X	X							
17. Riverside – Ames	Elementary	Chicago suburb	X	X												
18. Springfield – Hay Edwards	Elementary	Central	X												X	
19. Springfield – Fairview	Elementary	Central	X					X								
20. Tolono – Sidney	Elementary	East Central												X		X
21. VIT, Table Grove	Elementary	West Central													X	X
22. Wheeling – Longfellow	Elementary	Chicago suburb	X									X				

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Focusing the Observation

It may be useful for a school visit team to have an observation/recording tool to use while on a site. Some or/all of these questions may be used to customize an observation tool prior to the visit.

Teaching and Learning:

- What is the instructional activity?
- What resources are required to implement this practice?
- How do the teaching strategies used in the Reading Best Practice integrate with other core subjects such as math, science and social studies?
- How does the teacher build upon prior learning?
- How is time managed in order to implement the strategy?
- How are students grouped?
- How does the teacher transition from lesson to lesson or activity to activity?

Student progress and Achievement in order to promote Best Practices:

- How are students engaged?
- How does the student work reflect the practice?
- How do the students demonstrate their understanding?
- How does student progress inform instruction?
- How is the Best Practice assessed?

The Learning Community:

- What does the physical environment of the school/classroom look like?
- What is the overall climate of the classroom?
- What is the relationship between the teacher and the student?
- How does the organizational structure of the school support the implementation of the best practice?
- What do you notice about the school culture?
- What professional development is necessary for this Best Practice?
- What opportunities are provided for staff to meet together and regularly discuss reading instruction?
- How are the families/communities involved?

General:

- How many teachers regularly use the practice?
- What published or basal reading program is used? How much do teachers rely on the program?
- How frequently is the best practice used? What challenges are/were faced? What would you do differently?
- What did you have to give up to implement this practice?
- What would you tell others who are hoping to implement this best practice?
- How did you reallocate your resources (time,money and people) to implement the best practices?

Best Practices in Reading: Possible Strategies

Provided below is a list of possible strategies that are appropriate to the practice. These are not the only strategies for each Best Practice.

Best Practice 1: Explicit Word Analysis Instruction, Including

Teachers provide explicit instruction, build word knowledge, and directly teach skills and strategies for word analysis (phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition, structural analysis, context clues, vocabulary) with and without the use of text.

Possible Strategies

- -Word walls
- -Word Webs
- -Songs
- -Charts
- -Context clues
- -Highlighting texts by framing, pointing, sentences strips, and/or innovation
- -Poems
- -Nursery rhymes
- -Discussions on familiar topics
- -Etymologies, suffixes, prefixes and roots
- -Compare and contrast
- -Word analysis
- -Dictionary use
- -Making words
- -Graphic Organizers
- -Listening and oral reproduction tasks for phonemic awareness
- -Explicit telling of sounds and letters
- -Other _____

Best Practice 2: Assessment to Inform Instruction

Teachers routinely monitor and assess the reading levels and progress of individual students. This ongoing evaluation directs and informs instruction.

Possible Strategies

- -Running Records
- -Interest Inventories
- -Miscue Analysis
- -Literature response journals
- -Individual/group reading inventories
- -Illinois Student Profile
- -Student led conferences
- -Anecdotal records/notes
- -Observation checklists
- -Reading logs
- -Portfolios
- -Work sampling
- -Read aloud books of student choice
- -Learning logs
- -Standardized assessment
- -Other _____

Best Practice 3: Instructional Planning

Teachers plan instruction considering three phases: before, during and after reading.

Possible Strategies

-KWL
-Integrated units
-Questioning the author
-Conceptual change activities
-Graphic organizers e.g., Venn diagrams
-PreP techniques
-Directed, reading, thinking, listening, (DRTL)
-Guided reading
-Reciprocal teaching
-CRISS (Creating Independence through Student Owned Strategies)
-Study guides
-Thematic units
-Read alouds
-Mind maps
-Anticipation guide
-Story Impressions
-Other _____

Best Practice 4: Collaboration and Reflection

Teachers routinely self-reflect and collaborate on instructional practices and student progress within school and/or district.

Possible Strategies

-Shared planning time
-Shared learning experiences,e.g., classes, workshops
-Reading curriculum workshops
-Teachers evaluate/ interview student work together
-Teacher exchange days
-Grade level meetings
-Multi-grade level meetings
-Action research
-Teacher participation in seminars on professional readings
-Peer coaching
-Team teaching
-Study groups
-Group discussions of student work
-Mentoring
-Other _____

Best Practice 5: Learning Standards

Teachers facilitate conceptual knowledge of Illinois English Language Arts learning standards.

Possible Strategies

-Formal process to align curriculum and instruction to standards
-Student articulation of what they are learning (refer to standards)
-Standards posted in classrooms
-Student progress is reported by standards
-Faculty study groups on standards
-Other _____

Best Practice 6: Independent Reading

Students have opportunities for sustained reading (oral and/or silent) every day to increase fluency and vocabulary.

Possible Strategies

-Sustained silent reading
-RIF (Reading is Fundamental)
-Paired/partner reading
-DEAR periods
-Read and relax
-Other _____

Best Practice 7: Variety of Genre

Students have broad reading and writing experiences (multiple genre and styles). Reading to students at all grade levels is part of this broad experience.

Possible Strategies

-Shared book experience
-Classroom publishing
-Sustained silent reading/DEAR
-Oral interpretation
-Journal writing
-Drama/Play
-Dialogue journals
-Integrated or thematic units
-Literature circles
-Spelling workshop
-Daily Teacher read aloud
-Readers theatre
-Choral reading
-Radio Reading
-Reading workshop
-Writing workshop
-Debate
-Other_____

Best Practice 8: Appropriate Instructional Levels

Students have opportunities to read at their instructional level every day.

Possible Strategies

-Shared book experience
-Rereading whole text
-Choral reading
-Paired partner reading
-Fluency assessment
-Echo Reading
-Radio reading
-Other _____

Best Practice 9: Reading for Purpose

Students have extensive opportunities to read for a variety of purposes and to apply what is read every day. Discussion and writing are used by students to organize their thinking and they reflect on what they read for specific purposes.

Possible Strategies

-Shared book experience
-Classroom publishing
-Daily teacher read alouds
-Sustained silent reading/DEAR
-Dialogue journals
-Integrated or thematic units
-Junior Great Books
-Journal writing
-Radio reading
-Readers theatre
-Choral reading
-Literature Circles
-Other _____

Best Practice 10: Building Comprehension Skills and Strategies

Students are taught and given opportunities to apply the following comprehension strategies for constructing meaning: making and confirming predictions, visualizing, summarizing, drawing inferences, making connections, and self-monitoring.

Possible Strategies

-Semantic mapping
-ReQuest procedure
-Venn diagram
-Anticipation guide
-Teacher or student led discussion
-Think alouds
-RAFTs (Role, Audience, Format, Topic)
-Reader response/ journaling
-Reciprocal Teaching
-Mind maps
-Character webs
-Story maps
-Story impressions
-Summary/retelling
-Identifying with character
-Guided Reading technique
-GIST(summarizing technique)
-Plot relationship charts
-Story Pyramid
-Story frame
-CRISS
-Repeated reading
-QARS
-Note-taking
-Other _____
-Study skills

Best Practice 11: Building Cognitive Skills and Strategies

Students are taught and given opportunities to use cognitive strategies to synthesize, analyze, evaluate and make applications to authentic situations.

Possible Strategies

-ReQuest procedure
-Literature Circles
-Reciprocal teaching
-Junior Great Books
-SQ3R (Study, Questioning, Reading Review, Recite)
-DR-TA (Directed Reading Thinking Act)
-Guided reading procedure
-Writing response to literature
-Shared journal writing
-Think alouds
-Study guides
-Other _____

Best Practice 12: Integration

Reading and writing are integrated and used as tools to support learning in all curricular content areas.

Possible Strategies

-Author's chair
-Peer conferencing
-Classroom or school publishing
-Integrated or thematic units
-Language experience approach
-Reading documents
-Reading workshop
-Writing workshop
-CRISS
-Other _____

Best Practice 13: Literacy Rich Environment

Literacy rich environments display words and print everywhere, provide opportunities and tools that engage students in reading and writing activities, and celebrate students' reading and writing efforts. Each classroom has an extensive collection of reading materials with a wide range of high-interest fiction and non-fiction books at developmentally appropriate reading levels which motivate and support reading and writing. The room design supports whole group, small group and individual instruction.

Possible Strategies

- -Comprehensive classroom libraries: newspapers, magazines, poetry, high interest leveled books for all abilities, interests and content areas
- -Environmental print in classrooms and building
- -Resource books, child created books, comic books, menus, technical books
- -Chairs, tables, computers and other equipment allows flexibility for whole class groups, small heterogeneous groups, cooperative learning individual work
- -Special projects, programs or events, e.g., poetry reading
- -Student work displayed in classrooms and throughout the school
- -Word of the day
- -Internet access
- -Other _____ assemblies,

Best Practice 14: School / Family / Community Partnerships

Families, communities, and schools collaborate to support literacy development of students at home and school.

Possible Strategies

- -Reading tutors
- -Cross-age reading
- -Service learning via classrooms integrated into writing and reading
- -Business and community organizations provide incentives for reading
- -Celebrity Reading Days
- -Access to books that can be taken home
- -Park district/summer reading program
- -Community based extended reading program
- -Building wide thematic focusing on author/genre
- -Book talks
- -Education-to-career
- -Homework assistance (Telephone, computer, etc.)
- -Other _____

Reflecting After a Site Visit

- What further communication/intervention will be made with the site visited, if any?
- How will the information gained be shared with the rest of your staff?
- What was the most valuable aspect of participating in the site visit?
- How does the information learned at the visit reflect the your own school improvement plan and goals to improve student learning?
- How can the staff be encouraged to try new approaches in their classrooms?
- How can time be arranged for teachers to regularly discuss reading and share best practices used in their classrooms?
- How can parents be informed in how to use best practice strategies with their children at home?
- If the decision is made to implement a best practice:
  - How will the whole staff be involved in the planning of the best practice implementation?
  - How will the families/community be involved in the best practice planning and implementation?
  - What materials and resources will be needed to plan and implement the best practice strategies in your school?
  - What support will be needed from the superintendent's office?
  - What professional development can be offered to support teachers in the use of best practices?
  - How will the use of best practices in instruction be maintained in the school?

RESOURCES

The following list of resources is available through the Illinois State Board of Education:

- ISBE web site: http://www.isbe.state.il.us
- Little Red Reading Book
- Illinois Learning Standards
- Common Threads Brochure
- Best Practice Brochure
- Guide to Commercially Prepared Reading Inventories
- Program Descriptions of Learning and Leadership Sites

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